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3C Reports CIA Agents in Rome In Hot Water

W YORK

The Reagan administration is investigating whether the CIA station chief in Rome and two of his agents disobeyed presidential orders in connection with the investigation of the shooting of Pope John Paul II, NBC News reported Wednesday.

The three, whom the network by law did not identify, raised the ire of officials in Washington because they refused to stop "discrediting" the so-called Bulgarian connection in the inquiry of the papal shooting, NBC said.

Mehmet Ali Agca, a Turkish gunman serving a life sentence for the attempted assassination of the pope on May 13, 1981, has told Italian investigators that several Bulgarians helped him plan the attack. Bulgaria has denied any involvement, as has its close ally, the Soviet Union.

Quoting an unidentified key administration source, NBC said the three may be fired because they allegedly disobeyed orders issued by National Security Adviser William Clark and CIA director William Casey.

In Washington, CIA spokesman Dale Peterson said "We'll have no comment until we see" the NBC report.

Sen. Alfonse D'Amato, R-N.Y., said last month after a visit to Rome that he had been told the CIA was trying to block an investigation into the papal shooting.

But President Reagan said at a dinner a week later that he favored a full investigation of the shooting, and Secretary of State George Shultz denied that the CIA was seeking to discourage the probe.

NBC said the Rome agents may have downplayed the Bulgarian connection because they did not want attention drawn to:

An alleged "close working relationship" between them and an Italian labor leader who was arrested as a Bulgarian spy, or

The possible use of a guns and drug smuggling route between Sofia, Bulgaria, and Milan, Italy, to run CIA agents into Eastern Europe.